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# REVIEW OF SECTORAL CLUSTERS, FIRST PHASE: HEALTH, HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AND FRESHWATER

## Draft decision submitted by the Chairman

## Freshwater

1. The Commission on Sustainable Development, at its second session, considering agenda item 6 (a), noted with great concern that many countries faced a water crisis with rapid deterioration of water quality, serious water shortages and reduced availability of freshwater, which severely affected human health, the ecosystem and economic development, due to:

(a) Increasing water demand, inappropriate water resource management and a lack of groundwater protection, particularly in agriculture and in and around areas of urban concentration;

(b) Natural and man-made causes of water shortage, such as periodic droughts, falling water tables, changing weather patterns, a reduced capacity of soils in some areas to retain moisture due to land degradation within catchment areas, and land degradation generally;

(c) A lack of public awareness about the need for conservation of freshwater supplies, especially safe drinking water, and for proper sanitation, associated with a lack of recognition of water as a finite resource, a social and economic good and an essential part of ecosystems.

2. The Commission was concerned that the water crisis infringed the basic human needs of present and future generations.

3. The Commission realized that the crisis needs urgent and concrete action by national Governments as well as international organizations in order to

implement chapter 18 of Agenda 21, 1/ particularly by supporting developing countries.

4. The Commission recommended that countries give priority attention to the integrated management, mobilization and use of water resources in a holistic manner, while stressing the importance of the involvement of local communities, in particular of women.

5. The Commission called for water to be considered as an integral part of the ecosystem, a natural resource and a social and economic good, the quantity and quality of which determined the nature of its utilization for the benefit of present and future generations.

6. The Commission recommended that the conservation and sustainable use of water should be given high priority, and invited the Subcommittee on Water Resources of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) to initiate model projects, to be carried out by relevant agencies, in order to examine and exemplify the feasibility of water-saving strategies in water-intensive agricultural, industrial, urban and domestic sectors.

7. The Commission realized that, in order to create changes through the new approaches brought about by Agenda 21, special attention should be given to:

(a) The mobilization and integrated management of water, including pollution minimization and prevention, taking into account implications for health, for the environment, for social and economic policy and for spatial planning;

(b) Investigations into the environmental flow requirements necessary to maintain healthy aquatic ecosystems and the development of integrated institutional methodologies for that purpose;

(c) The integrated management and conservation of river and lake basins, nationally, internationally and at all appropriate levels;

(d) The involvement of those people that were most directly affected by water management strategies in the planning of water infrastructure projects;

(e) Efforts to enable the integrated management of water at the lowest appropriate level and shifting to a system of a sustainable demand management;

(f) The implementation of the polluter pays principle, a pricing of water that equals its full costs while taking into account the special condition of the poor, and the prevention of wasteful consumption;

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1/ Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992, vol. I, Resolutions Adopted by the Conference (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex II.

(g) The encouragement of partnership projects between all parties concerned;

(h) The promotion of a gender-perspective in water resources management;

(i) The modification of patterns of behaviour towards clean water and hygiene, including the promotion of educational programmes in that sphere;

(j) The promotion of greater efficiency of sustainable water use, water conservation and protection, particularly in agriculture, and the increased application of rainwater-harvesting techniques;

(k) The conservation and sustainable management of forests, including the promotion of afforestation as a significant means of halting soil degradation and increasing moisture retention;

(l) The bridging of the gap between physical, human and financial resources and the escalating demand for water and the need for sanitation;

(m) The search for innovations, both technological and non-technological, to protect our finite and vulnerable water resources, as well as the sharing of such innovative technologies on a global basis, in particular with developing countries;

(n) The use of environmental impact assessments with a multidisciplinary and multisectoral approach as a decision-making tool in water resources projects.

8. The Commission urged Governments to mobilize, within the framework established by chapter 33 of Agenda 21, adequate financial resources, through the use of all available sources and mechanisms, as well as maximizing the availability and smooth flow of additional resources, to implement chapter 18 of Agenda 21, and urged United Nations agencies and programmes to provide the necessary technical assistance, particularly to developing countries.

9. The Commission stressed the importance of capacity-building and the strengthening of institutional and human resource development programmes, in particular in developing countries, as an essential condition for efficient water management, mobilization and protection; priority should be given to the participation of women and youth at all levels of capacity-building. In that respect, the Commission took note of a constituent meeting of an International Network of Basin Organizations, held in Chambéry, France, from 4 to 6 May 1994.

10. The Commission encouraged the involvement of the private sector, the utilization of the "build-operate-transfer" approach and public-private partnerships when realizing water-related projects through foreign direct investment, international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, bilateral assistance and partnership projects between stakeholders.

11. The Commission took note, with appreciation, of the outcome of the International Ministerial Conference on Drinking Water and Environmental Sanitation, hosted by the Government of the Netherlands (Noordwijk, 22 and

23 March 1994) and of the results of the Round Table on Water and Health in Underprivileged Urban Areas hosted by the Government of France (Sophia Antipolis, 21-23 February 1994).

12. The Commission endorsed the Action Programme presented in document E/CN.17/1994/12 (annex), as one of the main instruments to assist in implementing programme area D of chapter 18 of Agenda 21.

13. The Commission requested that countries include in their 1997 national reports a specific section on national goals and strategies in the field of drinking water and environmental sanitation, including, as appropriate, target dates, with a view to the implementation of the Action Programme and with the assistance of international organizations.

14. The Commission invited Governments to assist on a voluntary basis in the furtherance of chapter 18 of Agenda 21 and to report on those activities to the Commission in 1997. It welcomed in that respect the offer already made by France, Morocco, the Netherlands and Tunisia regarding the implementation of the Action Programme.

15. The Commission welcomed the work carried out by the organizations of the United Nations system through the ACC Subcommittee on Water Resources with regard to the systematic collection and analysis of information.

16. In that context, the Commission urged the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and other relevant United Nations bodies, as well as non-governmental organizations, to strengthen their efforts towards a comprehensive assessment of freshwater resources, with the aim of identifying the availability of such resources, making projections of future needs, and identifying problems to be considered by the special session of the General Assembly in 1997.

17. The Commission recommended to the Economic and Social Council to invite the Committee on Natural Resources to address, as part of the comprehensive assessment, the question of freshwater, at its third session in 1996.

18. The Commission invited Governments to cooperate actively with technical inputs to the process, taking into account the need for support for the full participation of developing countries, and welcomed the offer of the Government of Sweden to contribute in preparing a preliminary assessment of freshwater.

19. The Commission decided to review, at its 1997 session, the result of all the work outlined in paragraphs 16-18 above, in preparation for the 1997 special session of the General Assembly.

20. The Commission requested the Secretary-General to strengthen coordination within the United Nations system with a view to concentrating and consolidating the great amount of international action in the field of water, including the implementation of chapter 18 of Agenda 21, and to report to the Economic and Social Council.

21. The Commission further recommended to the Economic and Social Council that it consider the issue at its coordination segment in 1995.

22. The Commission took note of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, 2/ adopted at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, and urged that adequate support be given to various strategies identified in the Programme of Action to address water resources issues, in particular those related to water supply and environmental sanitation, as well as the health dimension of water quality.

23. The Commission recommended that future international conferences, such as the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) and others, take into account relevant international agreements on water resources issues, in particular those related to water supply and environmental sanitation, as well as the health dimension of water quality.

24. The Commission invited the Secretary-General to transmit the above recommendations to those conferences.

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2/ Report of the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown, Barbados, 26 April-6 May 1994 (United Nations publication, forthcoming), resolution 1, annex II.